3:Cable & French M-5 (1926) 1927
AF13 Northwest China AF13

returned, and the Military Guard of Kiayükwan having bade us 'good-bye and a pleasant journey,' we started off in good spirits; nevertheless, silence soon fell on us when we realised we had turned our backs on China, and were ourselves literally without the Gate.

We were now[1] to learn by personal experience that the cold of the desert nights is only equalled in intensity by the midday heat. Water being unobtainable for very long distances, the strain is too great for the animals during the day, consequently all stages must be taken by night. It was 5 p.m. when the many-storeyed tower of the fortress finally disappeared beyond the horizon, and the undulating expanse of the Gobi was all that was to be seen lying around on every side. Desert travelling is a memorable experience. Immediately after sunset an icy breath steals along the earth's surface, and instantly the carter dons his heavy sheepskin coat. Silence instinctively falls on the party as the twilight swiftly closes in, and the horses settle to a steady stride. Thanks to the telegraph poles with their single wire, we still have *one* link left with the outer world; so we cannot miss our way.

Generally, once in the night, we passed a string of carts from distant Turkestan, or we heard, a good half-hour before they actually appeared, the clang of bells belonging to a caravan of at least fifty camels, which shuffled past us grunting, soon to be swallowed up in the surrounding shadows. Some time in the night we heard the jingle of merry bells peculiar to one traveller, and all would cry out: 'Here come the Mails.' Unlike all other riders, the Courier comes at a sharp canter, his heavily-laden horse in a lather. At each stage a fresh horse and messenger are waiting to carry on the bags. He is always cheerful, always friendly, and full of information. According to his account it is we who are

1 [Between Kiayükwan and Yümen--Analyst]

3;Cable & French M-8 (1926) 1927 AF13 Northwest China AFL3
Sinkiang A1 1

when we asked for protection from the dangers of the road, as they recognised instinctively that: 'Happy is the people whose God is Jehovah.'

It was great joy at one small oasis[1] to be greeted by an old friend, a man who had registered his name in Ansi as an enquirer. He had been appointed as inspector of the poles which carry the single telegraph wire across this part of the desert, the gales so constantly uprooting them that the whole route is divided into sections, each of which is placed in the charge of a responsible man whose business it is to keep them in repair. At a further stage of the journey where the work was not so well arranged, we often found the poles lying flat, our mules' feet being in danger from the entangled coils upon the ground. The line of the trade-route is indicated by this single telegraph wire, which often seems to the despairing traveller the only assurance he has of human things not seen—men, families, cities, and the normal objects of life.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE RAVINE OF BABOONS

At Iris Well we were only thirty long miles from Hsinghsinghsia, the military frontier station of Turkestan. We were anxious to arrive by daylight as we had reason to anticipate delay, and we hoped that twenty-four hours would be sufficient for transacting all business relating to passports and permits; it was a great relief, therefore, to see the clouds gathering, which meant the promise of a cool day. Taking advantage of this we hurried up all our preparations, and left in good time. At midday we reached the frontier proper—a waterless

[1] [Near Malienking -- Analyst]

Even the imperial telegraph line led over the N.W. China AF 13 bleak saddle of 206
the Dschedo la and its 4,390-meter altitude. (1) The line had

1. Kreitner-Szechenyi 4,499 meters; Rockhill 4,365 meters (14,320 feet); Gill 4,425 meters (14,515 feet; War office map 15,000 feet.

just been completed as far as Ba tang. My Hsining men who had never before seen a telegraph line had to conduct a detailed investigation. Of course, they had long since heard that one could send a whole letter over the wires, but they had the most adventuresome ideas as to how this was done. They wanted to cut the wire and see what the hollow space inside looked like. Shortly after I had dissuaded them from this wild idea we met a telegraph sentry consisting of six men strong. They were looking for a damaged wire because the service had been interrupted the day before. It seemed a miracle to me that one could telegraph at all at the time because hardly any of the insulators on the poles were intact. The Tibetans regarded them as a particularly suitable target for their guns as well as for their beloved stone slings.

Beyond the Dschedo Pass the eye first of all falls on bare rocky 133
ridges and on broad, planed-out and dry ravine bottoms. The peaks in the vicinity of the pass rise above 5,000 meters. They are all still below the boundary of perpetual snow and one could discover on them only scattered white spots. However, when one descends the steep, uneven military road which was paved many years ago, and when one has turned the corner and reached an eroded ravine bottom, then suddenly gigantic fields of perpetual snow sparkle in the south (Plate XLVI). In front of these in the depths nestles the Dschedo Valley with the little village of Dschedo, an important stopping place for the night for people coming from below. Before one 137
reaches this town one crosses the wide rhododendron zone /202/ which, with its large white and pink blossoms, extends down from 4,500 to 3,800 meters. The large blossoms were just opening and the steep mountain slopes sometimes formed a veritable sea of blossoms. Long before one reaches Dschedo one is within the boundary of mountain forests, and the amount of moisture which the monsoon must unload in these border mountains has caused an almost impenetrable jungle to develop on both sides of the valley, on the northern as well as southern slopes.

Near Dschedo the ravine which is used by the road abandons its 000
southeasterly direction and turns due east, and now all at once there